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S E C R E T BOGOTA 007453

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/27/2017  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [MARR](#) [CO](#)  
SUBJECT: COLOMBIAN HIGH-VALUE TARGET OPERATIONS BEARING  
FRUIT

REF: A. 06 BOGOTA 04983  
[1](#)B. BOGOTA 6460

Classified By: Ambassador William R. Brownfield  
Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

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SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (S) The Colombian military's successful operation against FARC 16th Front commander and leading narcotrafficker Tomas Medina Caracas aka "Negro Acacio" shows that the Colombians--with substantial U.S. support--have advanced in intelligence, strike accuracy, mission planning and deployment, operational security, and the inter-service coordination needed to attack high value targets (HVTs). The Colombian military hopes to build on the Acacio operation to take down additional HTVs The GOC believes a string of successful HVT operations would substantially disrupt FARC command and control, and erode Secretariat cohesion. END SUMMARY.

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HURDLES TO HITTING HVTs  
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[1](#)2. (C) Past Colombian military efforts to engage HVTs in the FARC have had limited success. Despite some captures and kills of mid-level leaders -- front commanders, financial operatives, or explosives experts (Ref A)--the Colombian military has never scored a hit against a member of the FARC Secretariat. Even with actionable intelligence on HVTs'

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whereabouts, multiple rings of FARC security and limited mobility in tough jungle terrain have limited the GOC ability to launch land assaults. As a result, the military's best option remains air strikes. Still, these strikes have been hampered by slow deployment and weak operational security. Additionally, Colombian Air Force high-fly rules and low visibility through jungle canopy have led to poor bombing accuracy with conventional aircraft and munitions.

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INTEL AND ISR UPGRADES  
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13. (S) With U.S. assistance, the Colombian military has begun to overcome these technical/informational obstacles to launching successful HVT operations. The most marked gains have occurred in intelligence, with a growing flow of tips from informer networks, demobilization programs, and rewards.

These tips have been integrated with signals intelligence and imagery collected by Colombian and U.S. aerial surveillance (ISR) platforms to create tactical intelligence targeting packages developed by the Embassy Intelligence Fusion Center (EIFC). The GOC continues to expand its supporting IT infrastructure to enhance its capacity to exploit its ISR platforms, particularly with high-resolution photo images. A recent USAF review found the Colombians' image software can support strikes within 30 meters of accuracy. This will lessen dependence on restricted U.S. products and ease sharing among services. The military has also improved at translating intelligence into targeting packages or operational plans.

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PRECISION STRIKE CAPABILITY  
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14. (S) The Colombian Air Force has also increased its precision strike capability through investment in upgraded light attack aircraft. Its new Brazilian-made Super Tucanos feature advanced avionics and precision in-flight target guidance, augmenting pilots' ability to strike using visual cues. The Air Force has ten Tucanos and 15 more on order. The establishment of a rotary wing squadron in 2008 will further advance HVT ground operations.

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THE JOEC: FOCUS, URGENCY, SECRECY  
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15. (C) The military is also continues to gradually resolve longstanding institutional obstacles to effective HVT operations, including slow response times, inter-service rivalries, and leaks. In April, the GOC set up the Joint Special Operations Command (JOEC) which works to develop HVT and hostage related operations. The JOEC has a target list of 12 senior FARC officials. Separate cells focus on a single HVT and study the target's movements. The JOEC has immediate access to the Defense Minister and priority in allocation of military assets. The JOEC compartmentalizes data for operational security. A minimum number of commanders read into operations, and briefings occur just before deployment. To encourage joint execution, the Ministry mandated that the Army, Navy, and Police pass all leads on the 12 HVTs to the JOEC rather than mount their own operations.

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NEGRO ACACIO  
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16. (S) On September 1 the military successfully struck a FARC camp, killing FARC 16th Front commander Negro Acacio (Ref B)--the first FARC official on the JOEC HVT list to fall. Acacio earned his spot on the list due to his key role as a leading FARC narcotrafficker. The GOC tracked him for years, but Acacio had survived multiple near misses. Forces moved into the theater 24 hours ahead of the operation against him, with no advance word on target specifics. For operational security, pilots only received coordinates. Troops that later entered Acacio's camp found signs of Acacio's death, and radio intercepts, indigenous accounts, and a deserter later confirmed his demise.

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LEVERAGING SUCCESS; MORE TO COME  
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17. (S) The Acacio operation reflected steady efforts to develop military assets and capabilities. Along with successful strikes against three front commanders earlier this year, this success may indicate a new benchmark in HVT

operations. Intelligence played the most vital role, particularly human sources familiar with camp layouts and HVT patterns. Operational security remains another key. Still, to realize more successes against HVTs, the military must make further progress in resolving the logistics, lift, and intelligence obstacles that prevent them from simultaneously tracking and launching against multiple targets.

18. (C) The FARC's response to the Acacio operation will remain critical. The FARC already shows signs of adapting its tactics to better evade detection and attack. If the FARC's tactics continue, HVT efforts could stall for lack of intelligence. If the FARC does not react quickly, a series of successes against HVTs could result. Most observers agree that the FARC has sufficient bench strength to replace its losses, but a string of successful strikes against HVTs could further disrupt its internal command and control and erode Secretariat cohesion. A September 4 El Tiempo editorial

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noted that, "It's one thing that the government's offensive has forced the FARC into a prolonged retreat. It is quite another that its leaders and camps begin to fall".

Brownfield